

Too much information

Councillor Birch has been asked to be part of a 'Getting to know Sunnyview' column in the local paper. She just needs to answer some questions about her life, including why she decided to become a councillor, and what her vision is for the city.

It's great timing. She feels that both she as an individual and the council as a whole have been unfairly represented in the press lately - this is a chance to set the record straight. A few weeks ago, the same paper published a story about a significant cost blowout for the upgrade of the civic precinct. Council has not publically confirmed the amount yet but it's just a matter of time.

As part of her column, Councillor Birch takes the opportunity to explain the source of the additional costs (soil cleanup that hadn't been factored into the initial proposal and unforeseen issues with contracting - neither of which could have been predicted). She received this information recently at a closed session of council but decides that being open about the reasons behind the cost blowout will help people to understand council's position. She doesn't go into detail and is careful not to confirm the amount cited by the paper.

What are the ethical issues in this situation?

- Confidentiality/use of information
- Representation of council

What could be the impact of this situation?

- Councillor Birch's actions may affect her relationship with other councillors and with council staff.
- Because she hasn't followed council processes in terms of releasing information, there could be repercussions for her, for the council and for the community.
- The community may lose trust in council's practices.
- This is a breach of the *Local Government Act 1993* (s 338A) and could be a breach of the council's code of conduct.



What processes could be put in place to ensure this doesn't happen?

- Ensuring that all councillors understand their legislative and code of conduct requirements in relation to confidentiality.
- Having a clear communications policy/ reference in code of conduct outlining process for councillors speaking in relation to council decisions.
- Having a process for articles etc. relating to council/ councillors to be checked before they are released publically.

Information used in this scenario is not based in fact, but has been created for the purpose of education and discussion. Any likeness to real persons or events is coincidental.

